

Lady Macbeth: A Sichuan Opera

by

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Dramatis Personae

Lady Macbeth

Macbeth

Ladies-in-waiting

Chorus

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[Music. The curtain rises. Hanging drapes barely visible in dim light.]

Chorus: The court is all quiet; the hidden quarter still.

The night has fallen dark; the ladies are in deep dreams.

[Knocks on the door are heard. Lady Macbeth, in a questionable mental state, sits up on bed.]

Chorus: Who is knocking in the wee hours of the night?

[The knocking continues.]

Lady Macbeth: Who is knocking? Who is this? Who is this? [She rises.]

[The hanging drapes are lifted rapidly. Lady Macbeth hurries downstage. Meanwhile, several ladies-in-waiting, each holding a candle, enter from both sides of the stage and take their places behind each layer of drape. A group of four ladies-in-waiting hurry to kneel before Lady Macbeth.]

Lady Macbeth: [Looking around in great fear] Here it comes... here it comes... the wronged soul is here to seek revenge... I saw him... I saw him... He is here to get me... [To the four ladies-in-waiting] Hurry! Go latch the door with double locks. Do not let them in!

Four ladies-in-waiting: But Your Highness, no one is coming.

Lady Macbeth: No one is coming... But who is it that's knocking my door?

Four ladies-in-waiting: No one is knocking the door.

Lady Macbeth: That can't be true... I remember hearing someone knocking while I was sleeping, and it was still there when I woke up. [A sudden surge of joy] Oh! It must be him! It's him! [Speaking to herself] It is as if all just happened yesterday, when the foreign enemies invaded our land and attacked our people. Afraid of losing his kingdom, the emperor ordered my husband to lead the troops to fend off the invaders. After receiving the order, my husband immediately put on his armors and mounted his horse—there he departed with an awe-inspiring and vengeful look on his face. [Sounds of knocking] Listen, here it goes again... It is him! My husband, the Great General of Fierce Calvary, has now returned in triumph. [To the four ladies-in-waiting] Go open the gate now. Go! Go!

[Macbeth, dressed in black coat, enters the stage in an airily manner.]

Lady Macbeth: Welcome back, my Lord! Your humble wife wishes to extend heart-felt congratulations to your victory. [Bows. Walks closer to Macbeth.] I heard that your troops advanced with irresistible force, and that your invincible army encountered no opponents wherever it went. Now the ruthless invaders are expelled and our lost territory recovered—such extraordinary achievement is truly unheard of in our kingdom. I wonder if His Majesty has offered any reward as a token of appreciation? [Acts as if listening to Macbeth's words.] Really? You were given the title of The Duke of the West. The Duke of the West. This would make you second in command in the entire kingdom. But to speak the truth, for someone of your caliber even such a position is unworthy of your achievements. [Macbeth acts as if he is saying something. Lady Macbeth listens.] What are you saying? Did you say you would not hold this position for long? [Macbeth acts as if saying something. Lady Macbeth listens] On the golden throne in the Hall of Supreme Harmony? [Stunned.] You are not suggesting you want to be the emperor, are you? [Pause.] Well, why not? We are a pair of jewels. If you become the Emperor, your wife certainly would be the Empress. This is what it ought to be.

[Sings] Once upon a time,

a beautiful maid was wandering in the garden.
From the embroidered pavilion, she caught the sight
of a handsome young man.
When he walked, he walked like a jade tree standing against the wind.
When he stood, he stood like Mount Tai holding up the sky.
Raising his bow to his shoulder, he shot the wild geese flying high in the sky.
With bare hands, he captured the wild boar hiding in the woods.
The maid eloped with the man--
a great warrior with unusual talents.
A man of his caliber
is destined to ascend to the throne.
From now on, he will serve the interest of no one
But heaven and earth.

[Chorus sings] From now on, I am the chosen one.

Lady Macbeth: Hush hush... [keeps her voice down] keep it to yourself and do not tell anyone else. [Turns to Macbeth, probingly] But my Lord, there is no way for you to ascend the throne unless you dare to kill the emperor... [Macbeth acts as if saying something] What? Are you afraid of being called a traitor? [Grins] There is no need to worry about that—the crown prince will take all the blame. As soon as the Emperor dies, we will set the crown prince up and accuse him of regicide. You will then lead the imperial force to go after him in the name of the assassinated emperor. Upon hearing this, the crown prince would definitely flee—that would be the perfect moment for you to claim the throne. Isn't this a flawless plan? [Macbeth acts as if saying something again] Really? The Emperor, in expression of his kindness towards his subjects, will visit us today and spend the night in our humble place? And the crown prince is coming as well? Man schemes, Heaven disposes. Heaven has bestowed upon us the most precious opportunity. Tonight, you will become the Son of Heaven.

[Knocking on the door]

Lady Macbeth: Listen! Someone is knocking. The stupid emperor is here. [Macbeth exits.]

Chorus: Someone is knocking.

Lady Macbeth:

[Sings] Let us quickly conceal the plot and put on a smile.

Faking sincerity, we express our gratitude of this unexpected imperial favor.

We are busy from head to toe in repaying the emperor's kindness.

Flattery words flow out of our mouth like running rivers.

Let the sweet words flow until he relaxes his vigilance.

Songs of praise linger in the air of this palace,

We will sing until he is overwhelmed by the melody of appreciation.

When the night is dark and all quiet,

His blood will spill all over this ivory bed.

To this end, I am polishing, polishing, polishing this blade,
for my dear husband.

[A shiny sword descends from the curtain. Lady Macbeth takes it.]

Chorus: This crazy woman has completely lost her conscience.

Lady Macbeth: Who is talking behind my back? Lost my conscience? [Snorts] If you were in my position, you would probably be much more vicious than me. [Sharpens the blade.] Ha! I have been dying to do this for long, and finally it's time to sharpen the blade! Your Majesty, people say that you are the most sagacious Son of Heaven. And yet, if you were sagacious, you should have abdicated the throne to Macbeth, my husband. But you only granted him a petty title, the Duke of the West. Tonight,

this blade of mine will complete its mission. You are to take the blame, not us.
[Turns, ready to leave.]

[Macbeth enters the stage airily with a blood-stained dagger in his hand.]

Lady Macbeth: You have the bloody sword in your hands. Have you killed the stupid emperor? What? Not yet? You have to give him a deadly blow! You can't do it? You, you, you you you are a pewter spearhead that shines like a silver. Step aside and let me, your wife, help you finish this. [She runs around the stage per Sichuan opera conventions. Macbeth exists.]

[Lady Macbeth approaches the drapes and raises the sword.]

Chorus: No, do not do that!

Lady Macbeth: [Sings]

The wounded old man is groaning in pain,
His white hairs and wrinkles on his face remind me of my father. [Sword falls from her hands]

The crimson blood flows in front of my eyes,
His cries for help fill my ears.

I cannot bear to see his misery,

And my heart is filled with sympathy.

[She throws herself at him] Father! [She suddenly freezes.] No, he is not my father. He is the emperor, our emperor. Who killed him? Who killed him in my house? [She returns to her senses.] Oh, of course, to pave the way for my husband, we stabbed him. [Cries] After the first stabbing, the second one comes natural. [Picking up the sword.] Oh heaven! [She kneels.]

[Sings]

Please take away my humanity,
Wash my off benevolence.

Turn my heart into a piece of iron.
Give me the strength to lift a thousand tons. [Standing up]
Cruelty always accompanies ambition,
Compassion will never lead to presumptuous gains.
To achieve great things,
One must make efforts to take responsibility.
The weakness and fear of ordinary people,
Shall never stop me from achieving ultimate success.

[Lady Macbeth kills the emperor with the sword; blood spills on the white drape.
Lady Macbeth withdraws downstage].

Lady Macbeth: [Shouts]. The crown prince kills the king! The crown prince kills the king!...[A moment of silence. Lady Macbeth grins] hei hei hei hei....

[Ladies in waiting enter and help Lady Macbeth change clothes.]

[Ladies in waiting carry fruits and wine to the stage.]

[The black curtain on the center/up stage rises slowly. An ornate golden throne on a raised platform is shown.]

[Ladies in waiting stand around the raised platform.]

[Lady Macbeth looks around, showing a sense of confidence and satisfaction.]

[Macbeth enters the stage, takes the hands of Lady Macbeth. The two ascend to the throne.]

Chorus: The golden throne in the golden palace.

Lady Macbeth: The glare of its light is making me dizzy.

How many people fought painstakingly for it?

How many lost their lives for it?

How many good friends became enemies for it?

How many killed their own brothers and sons because of it?

Heaven has bestowed upon us some good fortune,

Our dream fulfilled.

Today we will proclaim the throne.

Even if my hands are stained with blood,

Chorus, This pair of blood-stained hands will uphold the power of the kingdom.

[Two ladies-in-waiting enter the stage with wine cups. They kneel in front of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and present the cups to them.]

[Macbeth and Lady Macbeth take the cups, pouring libation as an offering to heaven and earth, then toast and drink.]

[Lady Macbeth roars with laughter.]

[Sounds of door knocking.]

Lady Macbeth: [Startled.] Someone is knocking the door!

[Sounds of door knocking]

Lady Macbeth: [Drops the cup, screams] Someone is knocking the door!

[Lady Macbeth runs down-stage from the raised platform.]

[Curtains. Macbeth and ladies-in-waiting exit the stage.]

Lady Macbeth: [Move towards stage left, acts as if eavesdropping.] Someone said that Macbeth and I killed the emperor and abdicated the throne! [Moves towards stage right, acts as if eavesdropping.] Someone said that Macbeth and I killed the emperor and abdicated the throne! [Horrorified, withdraws and screams] Nonsense! You all talk nonsense! [Tries to pull herself together.] How could they possibly know that we killed the emperor? My scheme is so perfect, even the crown prince failed to defend for himself...Only Macbeth and I know our plan...how could they possibly know anything about it? [Walks back and forth in panic; stands in stunned silence; slowly stretches both hands out from under the cape; looks at both hands.] Could it be that...these hands...[looks at the blood-stained hands.] Blood! Someone else must have seen the fresh blood on these hands and figured out it is US who killed the emperor! They must have smelled the smell of blood on these hands! They must have known that it is US who kill that poor old fellow, who looks exactly the same as my father...(weeps, looks at both hands)...Oh no, blood...blood...

[Sounds of door knocking.]

Lady Macbeth: Someone is knocking my door! I have to washed off the blood from my hands before they come. [Calls for help.] Somebody brings me some water! I want to wash my hands...go get some water for me!

[Ladies-in-waiting brings water to the stage.]

[While Lady Macbeth is washing her hands, ladies-in-waiting perform group dance.]

Chorus: The water is clear...[ladies-in-waiting change formulation]

The water is warm...[ladies-in-waiting change formulation]

Wash the hands one more time...[ladies-in-waiting change formulation]

Cleanse the hands one more time...[ladies-in-waiting change formulation]

Wholeheartedly, strenuously...[ladies-in-waiting change formulation]

Wash and wash until they are clean.

Lady Macbeth: [sings] I can never get these abominable blood-stains off my hands!

There is no way to fool man or ghost.

I am so afraid—

Chorus: Afraid that someone would lead the troop to fetch you soon.

Lady Macbeth: [sings] I am so afraid—

Chorus: Afraid that the perturbed ghost comes to take your life.

Lady Macbeth: [sings] I tremble with fear,

I tremble with fear,

Chorus: Afraid that someone would come and knock the door.

[Sounds of door knocking.]

Lady Macbeth: [Stunned.] Here it comes...here it comes...the perturbed ghost comes to take my life! [Dodges and hides in between the curtains, horrified.] Fend off the ghost! Fend off the ghost! [Tries to find excuses.] I didn't kill him! I didn't kill him! [Stretch out both hands.] Blood! [Hides both hands behind the cape.] Give me some water! Give me some water! I want to wash my hands! [Runs back and forth, screams.] I want to wash my hands! Let me wash my hands!

[Sounds of door knocking. Lady Macbeth stunned. Sounds of door knocking. Lady Macbeth shivers with great fear. Sounds of door knocking.]

Lady Macbeth: Alas! [Suddenly faints and falls on the floor.]

[Moments of silence.]

[Ladies-in-waiting walks from various direction toward Lady Macbeth. They look at her in silence.]

Chorus: Shouldering all the blame and guilt,

Take time as you pass through the road to Hades.

~The End